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TAGS: [PREL](#), [KDEM](#), [IZ](#), [JO](#)

SUBJECT: KING UPBEAT ON IRAQI ELECTIONS; OCV BALLOT COUNT PROCEEDING

REF: A. AMMAN 772

[B](#). AMMAN 723

[C](#). AMMAN 713

SUMMARY

[1](#). In a CNN interview, King Abdullah said he was "very pleased" with the Iraqi elections and expressed optimism for the future of Iraq and the region. While he cautioned against Sunni marginalization, he dismissed claims that he was anti-Shia. Local media carried the King's statements but overall reaction to the election was mixed, with many publications taking a wait-and-see attitude. Over 92 percent of Iraqis registered in Jordan cast ballots -- but that was less than 10 percent of the highest estimated number of eligible voters here. According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the counting of all votes cast abroad will be completed by February 3, with the results sent to the Independent Electoral Commission of Iraq (IECI) by February 5. End Summary.

KING PRAISES ELECTIONS, LOCAL PRESS MORE CAUTIOUS

[2](#). During a live interview broadcast on CNN January 31 (and later quoted prominently in local press outlets), King Abdullah called the Iraqi elections "a very successful day" for the Iraqi people and said he was "very pleased" with the turnout. By going to the polls, the King said that Iraqis had sent a message that they "were not going to let extremists or insurgents step in front of their future." He further remarked that the elections had "set a good tone for the Middle East" and that he was "very optimistic" for the future. The King added, however, that he believed the Sunnis still felt "marginalized" and he encouraged the new Iraqi government to "be inclusive to bring the Sunnis into the fold." King Abdullah dismissed an allegation, sourced by the New York Times to an unnamed senior State Department official, that his past statements reflected "racist anti-Shia paranoia;" he said the Hashemite family has "a very special affinity for, and a very warm place in our hearts for all Shiites."

[3](#). Coverage of the Iraqi elections has dominated the Jordanian media (refs a, b). While some leading dailies lauded the Iraqi people for taking control of their future, most of the press took a more cautious approach. Several columnists acknowledged that overall participation was higher than expected, but expressed doubt that the newly elected government would be a representative one given the lower Sunni participation. Unusually, others, including prominent op-ed writers, gave their unqualified applause for what was described as a step toward self-government. A few die-hard Arab nationalists rejected the elections as "a farce" designed to legitimize the U.S. "occupation."

OCV BALLOT COUNTING ON TRACK

[4](#). During a press conference January 31 in Amman, IOM OCV Director Peter Erben confirmed that 92.2 percent of Iraqis who had registered to vote in Jordan had cast ballots during the January 28-30 voting period (ref c). Erben said that nearly 94 percent of those who had registered in the out-of-country voting program globally had gone to the polls, exceeding IOM expectations. "It was truly an exercise in freedom and overall it went exceptionally well," he stated. (NOTE: The 20,166 Iraqis in Jordan who registered to vote constitute roughly 10 percent of the highest estimated number of eligible Iraqi voters here. End note.)

[5](#). Erben rejected criticism that the OCV registration drive somehow "fell short" because only 28 percent of the targeted pool of one million Iraqis worldwide actually registered. Stressing that he had spent fifteen years working on elections, he called the Iraqi OCV registration results "outstanding" in comparison to typical developed country overseas voting, which he claimed average around ten percent

participation. According to Erben, the IOM expects to complete the counting of ballots cast abroad by February 3 and to send the results by February 5 to the IECI in Baghdad. While some ballots were mismarked, Erben added that the IOM had "experienced no major discrepancy or problems."

MINIMIZE CONSIDERED
HALE